DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 416 934 JC 980 137

AUTHOR	Tobolowsky, Barbara
TITLE	Improving Transfer and Articulation Policies. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges, Los Angeles, CA.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-JC-98-05
PUB DATE	1998-03-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	RR93002003
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Articulation (Education); College Preparation; College School Cooperation; Community Colleges; *Intercollegiate Cooperation; Policy Analysis; School Policy; School Role; Student College Relationship; Student Needs; *Transfer Policy; Transfer Programs; Transfer Rates (College); Transfer Students; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

This digest examines community college transfer and articulation and presents suggestions for more effectively meeting the needs of students. Community colleges should provide a base of education, vocational or general, which enables students to transfer successfully to a four-year institution, reenter the workforce, and/or advance their careers. To ensure the smooth transition of students transferring to a baccalaureate institution, community college faculty and administrators must also collaborate with their university peers to develop a seamless transfer curriculum. Evaluating the success of community colleges in this articulation and transfer process is often difficult, due to the complexity of the assessment process and the many variables involved. Various methods for calculating transfer rates that result in a large range of different outcomes are listed. More accurate models, which also take transfer readiness into consideration, have been developed as well, and provide an improved measure of transfer student success. While no standard measure of transfer rates exists, each methodology offers insight into a community college's effectiveness in serving its ever-changing population. (YKH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 416 934

ERIC Digest

Improving Transfer and Articulation Policies

Barbara Tobolowsky

ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
A. Cohen
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

JC 980 137

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges

University of California at Los Angeles
3051 Moore Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521
(310) 825-3931

Digest

March 1998

EDO-JC-98-05

Improving Transfer and Articulation Policies

by Barbara Tobolowsky

Transfer and articulation policies have grown more complicated as higher education has developed into a complex web of federal and state agencies, accrediting bodies, administrators, faculty, and staff (Rifkin). Articulation refers to the services provided for students transferring throughout higher education, including formulas developed to exchange credits, courses, and curriculums.

Initially, articulation was simple. A student went from high school to junior college to the university — a vertical progression (Kintzer). Today, the system is much more complicated. Baratta identifies several progressions as students move through higher education (Laanan & Sanchez). These include:

- Traditional transfer (community college to four-year institution)
- Returning transfer (community college to four-year institution, then returning to a community college)
- Reverse transfer (four-year institution to community college)
- Concurrent transfer, sometimes referred to as cross-enrollment (undergraduates simultaneously attending a four-year institution and a community college)
- Transfer eligible admitted (community college student admitted to a four-year school, but not enrolling in the four-year institution).

Thus, the ideal of a smooth progression of students through various higher education programs can be difficult to achieve. This is particularly so if there is little communication between the institutions involved or if the community college lacks programs to assist students in transferring (Knoell, Rifkin).

This Digest examines transfer and articulation in relation to the changing mission of the community college and the multiplicity of methodologies employed to assess transfer rates. It also presents some suggestions for improving community colleges' ability to address the needs of today's students.

The Evolving Mission of Community Colleges

Community colleges were developed as "elongated high schools...providing the first half of the baccalaureate degree" (Kintzer). However, even from inception, their mission included offering "terminal, semiprofessional courses" (Kintzer). In fact, vocational training has rivaled transfer as the primary community college mission in some institutions. Many adult students who have not attained a college degree enter community colleges to upgrade skills for reentry into the work force or advancement. However, they represent just a fraction of the new population of students entering higher education.

Today, it is clear that a bachelor's degree is essential for success in many careers, and a key aspect of the community college mission continues to be to provide courses for transfer toward a baccalaureate degree. Some colleges are establishing transfer centers or enlisting the support of faculty and staff committed to the transfer function who can help ease students' passage from one institution to another. However, not all institutions are committed to the goal of transfer. Thus, some states have stepped in to demand that institutions work toward the smooth flow of students into baccalaureate programs (Robertson & Frier).

The Success of Community Colleges

Success in this context is narrowly defined in terms of the ability of community college students to transfer and persist in the four-year institution. While there is agreement that this success should be understood and assessed, there is disagreement about how to measure it (Laanan & Sanchez).

Many different methodologies have been suggested, used, and criticized. Calculating transfer rates "must be based on some group of students: an entering set, an exiting set, or some subset within a larger group" (Cohen). Which group do you study? Where do you get the data? What is the time frame of the measurement? Do students transfer immediately after they complete their associate degree? Do they wait a year, two years, or four years?

Tracking the Transfer Students

Laanan and Sanchez outline some of the models employed to calculate the transfer rate.

- Flaherty used the number of students who transferred to an Illinois four-year college divided by the total enrollment the previous fall in all pre-baccalaureate programs.
- Flaherty also studied the California community college system and calculated transfer rates by dividing the number of students who transferred in 1988-89 by the number of high school graduates who had entered community college three years earlier.
- The National Effectiveness Transfer Consortium (NETC) developed a more complex measure. It surveyed students who enrolled in community college for a term, completed a minimum of six units, and did not return to the community college by the following fall term. The time frame is limited to a single year and required follow-up surveys of leavers or the cooperating four-

year institutions to determine who transferred.

- The Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) used a method developed by Cohen. This method tracked entering students who complete a minimum of twelve units divided by the number in this group who take one or more classes at the university within a four-year time frame.
- McMillan and Parke from the Illinois Community College Board adapted the NETC and CSCC models to limit the entering cohort studied to only those students in a baccalaureate-transfer, occupational, or general associate program, excluding students in self-improvement type classes and those who expressed no desire to transfer. They also raised the course requirement from six to twelve college credit hours.

Each of these approaches results in different transfer rates that range from 5% to 84% (Cohen). They also vary among community college districts and states. There are discernable differences between community colleges with high transfer rates and those with low transfer rates. The differences center on their articulation agreements, proximity to four-year institutions, common course-numbering systems, advising, cooperation between institutions, and transfer expectations at the community college itself.

These transfer rate measurements do not tell the whole story, however. Viewing only the students who transfer is not an accurate measurement of the success of the community college in properly preparing students for transfer (Rifkin). Some models have been developed that consider transfer readiness as well. One such approach, developed by Birdsall and Boese, looks at students who have completed transfer level courses in math or English and have earned fifty-six or more transferable units with a minimum grade point average of 2.00. This approach also is criticized because some students transfer with less than two years of courses (Spicer & Armstrong).

Since every approach has strengths and weaknesses and the range of results is vast, it is appropriate to use different measures for different purposes. As Laanan and Sanchez state, "The underlying policy implication for employing more than one measure is the notion that the diverse populations served by community colleges require multiple measures of success," (p. 42).

Intersegmental Collaboration

Community colleges have been pressured to respond to the growing population of adult students in need of retraining or skill upgrading to assist them in career advancement. In some instances, institutions have adopted the use of educational technology that gives the adult access to upper division courses without having to transfer physically to a four-year institution.

Knoell suggests community colleges prepare students to become faculty and staff at high schools and two-year institutions, particularly in the technologies. There has been some development to this end with a new "two-plus-two-plus-two" program that would eventually lead associate degree students to a master's degree in teaching by taking a specified menu of courses. Two important elements of this innovation are the seamless transfer agreements between institutions and the acceptance of work experience for credit units. This is a variation on existing six-year career education programs that begin in high school and lead to a baccalaureate degree.

It is essential that college and university faculty collaborate with their community college peers in the development of a seamless transfer curriculum. There needs to be coordinated agreement on general education requirements. Acceptance to both the two- and four-year institutions simultaneously would also assist in the articulation and transfer of students. Collaboration among institutions would aid students in concurrent or cross-registration. Knoell suggests joint use of some facilities and staff — library, articulation officers, laboratories — as a part of that collaborative effort.

Collaboration was in evidence when the Illinois Board of Higher Education worked to develop a general education curriculum in communications, math, humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, and physical and life sciences. This year-long project involved faculty members from the different disciplines at more than 100 two- and four-year institutions (Palmer).

Conclusion

Issues of transfer and articulation have grown more complex as the higher education system has grown. No standard measure of transfer rates exists; however, each of the methodologies offers information that is helpful in understanding the ability of community colleges to serve their ever-changing populations.

The transfer mission of community colleges has not always been the primary goal for institutions. However, with the growing belief that a bachelor's degree is required for professional success, the issue remains central to the current mission of community colleges. Collaboration between four-year and two-year institutions can only help to facilitate transfer.

References

This Digest is drawn from "Transfer and Articulation: Improving Policies to Meet New Needs," *New Directions for Community Colleges*, Number 96, edited by Tronie Rifkin, published in Winter, 1996. The cited articles include, "Orderly Thinking About a Chaotic System" by Arthur M. Cohen; "A Historical and Futuristic Perspective of Articulation and Transfer in the United States" by Frederick C. Kintzer; "Moving Toward Collaboration in Transfer and Articulation" by Dorothy M. Knoell; "New Ways of Conceptualizing Transfer Rate Definitions" by Frankie Santos Laanan and Jorge R. Sanchez; "Transfer and Articulation Policies: Implications for Practice" by Tronie Rifkin; "The Role of the State in Transfer and Articulation" by Piedad F. Robertson and Ted Frier; and "Transfer: The Elusive Denominator" by Scot L. Spicer and William B. Armstrong.

The ERIC Clearinghouse is administered by the National Library of Education and operates under OERI Contract No. RR93002003. The opinions expressed in this digest do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of NLE/OERI and no official endorsement by NLE/OERI should be inferred.